1: Hoebel E-5 (1933) 1940 NO6 Comanche NO6

685 Indian is said to have been opened at least a half dozen times. Attention is naturally directed to the possibility of grave robbery among the Indians before the depredations of the white man. Here again inquiry was met with denial, until one instance was finally related by Slope.

Case 36. Grave Robbery
Informant: Slope

"A wealthy man was in a cave. His body was dressed in his best clothes; and when he had been laid in the cave, the opening was closed up with rocks. The mourners went away down the hill toward the camp.

"As soon as they were out of sight, a tákapa (poor man), who had hidden nearby, came out and removed the upper rocks from the opening. Putting his hand in, he felt of the man's beaver-wrapped hair, and his silver ear-rings. The fresh air brought the dead man to life and he caught the hands of the marauder. So frightened was the youth that he uttered a piercing cry and struggled to get away. But the man spoke to him and begged him to get some water for him to drink. He asked the poor boy to run and tell the departing relatives that he was alive, and said he would give the youth anything he wanted.

"The boy set off at a run to tell the mourners what he had seen. When he caught up with them, he confessed his attempt to rob the grave and what had happened to him. They immediatcly turned about and went back to the cave. There they found their relative revived as the boy had said. They took away the rest of the rocks and gave him a drink of water. In gratitude to the poor boy, they forgave him for his act and gave him the good clothes which the man had been buried in and four horses."

It is evident enough that the robbing of graves was not in the category of usual forms of misconduct. Apparently no particular pattern of attitudes was worked out as to how to treat such violators; there was no need. The one case cited could easily have been otherwise handled if it had not resulted in the saving of the life of the "dead" man. One suspects that it may be more legendary than factual.

SUICIDE

●762 Suicide because of an overwhelming sense of shame was a definite Comanche pattern.

"When I was about fourteen years old I saw a woman who was either sick or pregnant hang herself," said Post Oak Jim. "She was ashamed of having a child when she was so old. She would stay away from camp all day. Finally she hung herself." And again, "Once there was a man who was whipping a horse in the face. The horse dodged, and he struck himself

1: Hoebel E-5 (1933) 1940 NO6 Comanche NO6

across the face with his quirt. He'd never been whipped. He got to thinking about it, so he got out his gun and shot himself. The people didn't know why he did it, and suggested things out of the way. Sometimes when Indians go on a raid they catch a disease and commit suicide because they don't want to go back that way. This man was a brave warrior; he had killed lots of enemies; he had power." 762

Among the Comanches a sense of the injustice of a formally justifiable act at times took the form of a protest-suicide. Or perhaps it might be released in some retaliatory act, such as killing a favorite horse or mutilating the good-looking sister of the man who had pushed the law too far. A boyhood prank of Gets To Be A Middle-Aged Man produced these double repercussions of incensed reactions to an over-strict legal settlement. 681 762

Case 37. Adultery and Retaliations
Informant: Gets To Be A Middle-Aged Man

684 882 689

"I was down by the creek one day with a friend when a woman came down for water. She was the sister of my friend's step-mother. I proposed that we seek intercourse with her. My friend agreed. So I went over to make the proposition to the woman. She was quite willing, provided that we would wait until she had taken the bucket of water back to camp. On her return I met her first, as I had demanded the first chance. While we were together there, her sister (my friend's step-mother) saw us, but she slipped quietly into the brush and said nothing. When my friend had his turn, his step-mother again spied and saw them together. She went right away to her sister's husband and informed him of his wife's doings with us.

"The man came to my father's tipi. He told him what had happened. 'What do you intend to do about it?' he asked my father.

"We were called in and he blamed us both with adultery. I denied any contact with the wife, but when my friend was charged he boasted, 'Sure I did it. It's an honor to be able to do such a thing as that.' The husband demanded damages, and when he received two good horses from my father, he departed satisfied.

"Then my elder brother came home from a raid and heard that two horses had been given because of our activity. He was angry. He took his bow and arrow and shot two horses dead in the herd of the woman's husband.

"Nothing further happened at that time. But then the younger brother of the husband came back from a raid and heard the story. He was angry that the two horses had been shot. Thinking that his older brother had been ill-treated all around, he went over and cut off the nose of my friend's beautiful sister.'

The whole difficulty generated from the fact that the wrong-doers were youths. Adultery does give cause for suit for damages, but boys were always in a favored position and indulgence should have been shown them.

1: Hoebel E-5 (1933) 1940 NO6 Comanche NO6

684 Gets To Be A Middle-Aged Man denied his guilt and nothing happened.
882 The other boy boasted, aggravating the situation. The elder brother, how-
689 ever, would not be imposed upon. To him it was lack of good taste and fairness for the old man to take two horses; hence his summary retaliation. The collaterals to the other party reacted in turn to this action as indecently harsh. They retaliated with mutilation of the sister. This last retaliation should not be confused with the principle of group liability (i.e., that the sister paid because she shared the responsibility). It was rather that the sister belonged to the brother and, as a good-looking girl, had value to him. Spoiling her visage was like mutilating his horse (possibly more so).

689 So too in the murder case (pp. 66–67 above) in which a war leader was slain for killing the two fat horses which had been offered him in compensation for one fat horse of his which had been eaten without his permission. The horses were his by acknowledged agreement. But that the chief should so scornfully kill them was too much for the other party. It was an insult to a man who had sought to do right. Though the killing was undertaken by one man and his captive, yet the entire group acquiesced, making no effort to dissuade him. Their inaction showed at least passive approval.

It appears that one should not press his bald legal rights too far. Too much pressure under the wrong circumstances generated the same type of back-fire which in recent decades has troubled modern Continental lawyers with the concept of "abuse of rights."

689 The sharpest back-fire in such situations was in protest-suicide. Witness
●762 the action of a disowned mother, who was rightfully denied by the son she had deserted.

Case 38. Suicide
Informant: That's It

"This woman was widowed with her four-year-old son. The band was moving camp and she had her boy tied in his little saddle on a pony. They were straggling along so much that they dropped behind the other people. A young man dropped back and proposed to the mother that they run off and marry. She agreed to that. But they did not want to be bothered with the child, so they tied his horse to a tree in the midst of a grove and left him there to starve.

"Later on some hunters, who were out after a bob-cat, came to the grove. One hunter said to the others, 'There's a horse standing over there.' The group went into the grove and saw the boy sleeping. They watched him. Some said they should wake him up. They woke him up and asked about his mother. He didn't know, but he told them the direction she had gone. The hunters followed the trail and came up to the main band. The mother was not there, so the boy was taken by his grandfather and raised to manhood, and got married.

1: Hoebel E-5 (1933) 1940 NO6 Comanche NO6

"One night his mother came back to the band. She went right into her son's tipi and shook his arm. She told him to get up and get some bison before they moved camp, because the people were going to a place where buffalo were scarce. 689 762

"The young man woke up and looked at her. He said, 'Did you call me "son"?' 'No,' he replied to her avowal, 'I have no mother. You tell me you're my mother. You don't know what you are talking about. Go away!'

"His mother uttered a groan and went back to her own tipi. Then she went out. She went down by the creek to a tree and threw a raw-hide rope over a branch. She stood on a log and put the rope about her neck. After that she kicked the log out into the stream and hung herself.

"The body was discovered by some hunters. All the people ran down there to cut her down and they buried her not far from the creek. The brother of the dead woman was angry. He said he would kill his nephew's wife. He said she must have had something to do with it; otherwise it would not have happened. But the young man and his wife ran away. They stayed with some other people until the trouble was forgotten."

Here again the son was legally right, for his mother had given up proper claim to him. For that in itself the son was not blamed. And yet to cause her such anguish that she committed suicide was going too far. In the uncle's thinking the son would not have done that of his own volition; his hussy of [157] a wife must have urged him to it! The forgetting of the trouble, by lapse of [152] time, shows the role of momentary passion, such as grief, or outraged dignity, in a hot-tempered people.

Nor should we fail to include the seeking of death in flaming glory on the battlefield, sought with reckless abandon by men whose honor was stained or whose failing constitutions held out the prospect of death on the sick-bed. These, too, were suicide: but suicide turned to public benefit.

Case 39. Suicide
Informant: Talker (Recorded by Jeannette Mirsky)

"Among the Yep-Eaters were two brothers: they were Thunder and Rocky Creek. They grew up together and never quarrelled. When they were yet young men their last remaining relatives died, leaving them alone. They were single men.

"Then came the time when Rocky Creek eloped with Eat Something; he took her on the war-path, for she was married to an old man. His brother was with him in this venture. But then they returned, Rocky Creek let her go; because she was a mean woman he did not want her.

"These brothers had a sister, Breaks Wind While Sitting, who was married. When they returned from the war-path they went to visit her.[1] Their brother-in-law,

[1] The rules of avoidance lapse when brother and sister have been married.

1: Hoebel E-5 (1933) 1940 NO6 Comanche NO6

684 ●762 who had been out hunting, returned with meat at the same time they arrived in camp. The next morning at breakfast both Rocky Creek and Thunder asked their sister to add some more fat to their meat. 'I did not endanger my life on the hunt in order that you should enjoy the best of it all,' their brother-in-law muttered. When he said this mean thing, Thunder pushed his meat aside.

"'Sister,' he requested, 'take this food away.' She obeyed him. The brothers washed their hands; Thunder motioned to the door, 'Come,' he said to Rocky Creek, 'let us go outside.'

"They left the camp to go up into the mountains; there they stayed all day even though it was winter. Towards evening another young man came along. He hailed them. 'What is the meaning of this? Why are you here? I know you have been here since early morning.'

"Thunder answered him, 'We are just thinking things over.'

"'What things?' the stranger asked.

"'I have no father or mother,' Thunder replied. 'There is only one thing left for me. Tomorrow I start out to seek death.'

"'Where then?'

"'In the white man's territory. I shall probably not return from there either.'

"The stranger said he would join them.

"As they started slowly on their way, they were met by several others in the same plight—young men without a place to go—tákapana. They travelled for days and days. Then they were being trailed by some soldiers who were led by an Indian scout. The young men stopped and killed some cattle for meat which they carried into a ravine to cook. Just as they sat ready to eat, one saw a cloud of dust. 'It is a whirlwind, I think,' he remarked to the others.

"'No,' said another. 'It is the soldiers on our trail.'

"Thunder spoke up then. 'Listen to me, brothers,' he commanded. 'Those of you who care to can still escape. Go now! I stay here. Here by this fire, for I have come seeking this very thing.'

"They waited. The soldiers were upon them. Here and there a man was picked off as the firing began. Rocky Creek approached his brother. 'I am shot,' he said. 'A bullet has wounded me.'

"'You can still escape. There is a way out down the creek. Go! But I am staying.'

"'Brother, come with me,' Rocky Creek pleaded.

"Thunder only answered, 'I am not leaving our fire.' The guns rattled on.

"By noon all the tákapana save one were dead. The firing ceased. Of all the young men this one alone lived to tell the story of what had happened to this homeless group.

"The brother-in-law who had begrudged food to his wife's brothers was an exception. When he acted so, it wounded their prides so that they went out to seek death. Many young men in the same circumstances courted death at enemy hands."

[558] So, too, did lovers who had lost face when a braver husband forced them to give up a stolen woman. Cases will be remembered from previous sections.

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Here, as in the Trobriands, we find suicide "a means of preventing people from extreme and unusual types of behavior."[2]

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[2] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom*, p. 98.

Professor Malinowski emphasizes another aspect of the situation which Professor Karl Llewellyn feels is not justified by the Melanesian data thus far at hand. The whole of the quotation cited above reads, "Thus suicide, like sorcery, is a means of keeping the natives to a strict observance of the law, or means of preventing people from extreme and unusual types of behavior." Llewellyn observes that the Trobriand data show not that suicide is a method of enforcing the *law*, but more likely that it is a method of protest *against* a too strict insistence upon the letter of the law—even as in Comanche society. But Malinowski's point holds for many cultures. Compare "fasting on a man" in ancient Ireland, revived in the modern hunger-strike. Devotion-suicide (as of the widow in ancient India) may merge into one institution with shame-suicide (as in old Japan), and in both phases run free either of protest or of effort at enforcement of rights or vengeance for wrongs. In our own civilization threatened suicide is sometimes met as pressure in love-matters; but the claims sought to be enforced are rarely "legal," even in the sense of primitive law. On the contrary, the pressure may be in every sense an illegal aggression. The act itself is almost without cultural meaning; only its context gives it color.

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1: Hoebel E-5 (1933) 1940 NO6 Comanche NO6

428 relationship." The maternal uncle had prior claim over the paternal.

However, the right to inherit must have meant very little when balanced against it were the exacting requirements of customary mourning. Ideally, the immediate family and even the brothers and sisters of a dead man gave away or destroyed property, their own as well as that from the estate. The
●[762] burial of a suicide-mother in the Yɛp Eaters band was in this pattern. The mother hanged herself because her son called her a bitch for not doing for him what his wife should have done. When the body was brought in by her
428 elder sister and father, they laid out a large buffalo rug over a thong. Then,
764 "on this they put all the pretty, fine things the *family* owned. They dressed the dead woman in all her finery, painted her face, combed and plaited her hair, painting the scalp red up the part. They covered her arms from wrist to elbow with silver bracelets. They put on her finest moccasins with silver dollar trimmings. She wore two beautiful belts with handsomely trimmed possible pouches, and so forth. The women dressed her body. (A man dressed a man's.) Her father sat at her head, calling on all her relatives and friends to take their last look. There was a big crowd gathered outside. 'We are going to throw her away. She is going to live in the ground,' he cried. After the people had seen her, they folded the blankets over her, folding in all the fine, pretty things; then they wound the thong about it.

"During this time the women wailed. They tore their dresses off, leaving only skin aprons to cover their mid-region. They hacked at their arms and legs and face. Some cut off an ear. The men cut their flesh, too. This was done by her immediate kin and close friends.

"They brought her horse then with its own saddle. Across it, they threw her body. They put their finest silver-mounted bridle on the horse. They all mounted their horses, and the sister led the funeral horse to a natural cave in the mountains. They put her in it with her saddle. Then they killed her mount.

"When they came back—there was her tipi where she had lived with her father. Back of it was her son's tipi. They put all their belongings inside and burned them. They had *nothing* left."[6]

When people so made themselves destitute, they were on the tribe. They were fed and cared for until they were ready to drop their mourning. Then the men of the family went afoot on a raid to get horses and start life anew.

428 In situations where the family did not spontaneously go as far as did this
626 last one, the public pressure of mourners *forced* them to further giving.
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[6] The quotations are from Tanner, recorded by Jeannette Mirsky.

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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From Cradle to Grave

When the sun was shining you were mighty nice. When the sun went down you were devils. Don't you remember how you were? Boys will be boys.' "[26] 887 522

They all laughed and let the matter drop. After all they were old men—peaceable, and not warriors jealous of their dignity.

Although they were a strong physical race of people, the Comanches were troubled with a number of diseases. Many of their ailments were due to their unbalanced diet, to exposure, and to the vigorous life they led. Among their more serious ailments were pneumonia, colds, rheumatism, wounds, broken bones, intestinal diseases, rattlesnake bites, smallpox, and cholera. The number with weak eyes, partially or completely blind, was appalling. Fevers often resulted from their trips to the east and south. The white intruders brought cholera, smallpox, and syphilis, which swept away many of the people. Epidemics of smallpox took heavy tolls in 1816, in 1839–40, and in the winter of 1861–62. The cholera epidemic of 1849, brought from the East by immigrants on the road to California, possibly resulted in more fatalities than the smallpox plague. In any event, whether from violence, disease, or old age, the end came inevitably to every Comanche as to every man—and the cycle was closed. 164

When the condition of an elderly person became hopeless, he was usually "thrown away" by all except his most faithful relatives and friends; and sometimes even they would desert him. This was not due so much to lack of affection and sympathy as from fear of the evil spirits and his ghost, which were believed to have taken possession of his body. When he felt death drawing near, he made disposition of all his property and retired to a quiet spot to die. After making medicine in preparation, an old man might take his own life, and at least one case is known where a man took the life of his wife by cutting her throat because she was hopelessly ill and lonely. 763 888 [762]

There was not a long delay between death and burial. If possible, burial took place the same day. The body was prepared with great care by anyone who would undertake the job, usually near relatives assisted by a comrade or close friend of the deceased. A woman attended to the body of a woman; a man attended to a man's. When a small child died, it was buried still lashed to its cradle-board. Before 764

[26] Informant: That's It.